

An awful sense of déjà vu

The awful echoes of the 1930s

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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If my folks were still alive I am sure this is exactly what they'd be feeling today. And, as the capitalist system inches ever closer to Armageddon, the question about the causes of war are still not part of the public discourse in a world where following the end of the Cold War, we were promised a peaceful world, free from the fear of annihilation.

Of course talk of Armageddon always puts you in the 'wrong' company but back in the 1930s, from at least as early as 1935, the general feeling across Europe was of impending war and it was relatively widely accepted that capitalism was the cause of wars. With the memory of WWI fresh in peoples' minds, it was in every sense a feeling of an impending Armageddon. People, well some people anyway, struggled bravely to halt the slide toward conflagration, my folks included.

Now you might well ask yourself that nobody in their right mind would welcome war and you'd be right to think so were it not for the fact that those who impel us in the direction of war never actually do the fighting, so the question of their sanity (or otherwise) is somewhat moot.

Today, by contrast with the 1930s, the question of who and how wars get started is not considered to be a major topic of conversation for the corporate media, except that is, as something that is as natural as breathing, though unlike breathing, 'regrettable'.

Consider if you will, the run-up to the invasion of Iraq; it was always presented to us as a 'last resort', 'Saddam left us no alternative', 'we were forced to act' and so on and so forth.

And it cannot have escaped your notice that prior to this, a considerable period of 'softening up' was needed in order to persuade us that it was necessary to start yet another war and, as per usual, war was necessary in order to 'preserve the peace'.

War and peace then, as far as the way the dominant culture presents it, are entirely interchangeable the difference being that when 'we' start a war it's for entirely noble reasons but when 'they' start one, that trusty catch-all, 'human nature' kicks in and 'they' are presented to us as 'evil'.

For several centuries the leading capitalist powers have been perfecting what they like to call the 'art' of war, not as an end in itself of course but as a means to an end but in the course of mechanising war, that is, industrialising it, it has increasingly come to dominate our economies to such a degree that now, many millions of people find that their livelihoods depend entirely on preparing for war, not that this is a new phenomenon; the history of the British Empire is rooted in what has effectively been for at least four hundred years, a war

economy.

The question therefore, given that none of us are particularly fond of the idea of war, either of starting one or getting dragged into fighting one, why is the reality of war accepted as 'normal' by the ruling political class and that of those who serve it, principally the media?

I know this sounds like a really stupid thing to say, but consider that it reveals an unspoken acceptance on the part of our rulers that war is a necessary, even a 'natural' element of our 'civilisation'.

The 'accepted' orthodoxy then is that war is 'natural' but if this is so, why is so much energy expended on persuading us to go to war?

Which brings me back to the 1930s and the experience of my folks' generation and central to the struggle of those times – times that have so much in common with the current situation – is the innate relationship between capitalism and war.

The 1920s saw the internal contradictions of the over-accumulation of capital reach crisis point with the Crash of 1929, which in turn set the scene for the rise of Fascism, whose major enemy was always socialism, for it was the *idea* of socialism as an alternative that presented the greatest threat to the capitalist order.

Today however, socialism is for the time being anyway, a discredited alternative but for how long? Moreover, there are enormous contradictions in the current situation; the biggest peace movement the world has ever seen; thoroughly discredited state machines; a global capitalist order that sees the re-emergence of serious intra-capitalist rivalries between the major trading blocs, the US, the EU and now China. So far from being the 'end of history', it would seem that the period we are now entering is the beginning of a new one.

And the takeover of Iraq, far from producing cheap energy to fuel the insatiable appetite of the US has had the opposite effect (notwithstanding the red herring of 'peak oil' which no doubt, will be the basis for a new rationale for US control of energy supplies). If the high cost of energy continues it can only lead to a global economic depression, which will in turn, lead to even greater instability, that in turn, will lead to ever more desperate measures being taken by the US and its loyal pet, the UK.

However, a general war such as we saw 1939-45, seems unlikely, more likely is a series of 'local' wars that will in turn, destabilise entire regions, leading to wider and wider conflicts like the ripples on a pond.

All of this assumes of course that the imperium will meet no meaningful and effective opposition from its domestic populations. Which brings me full circle, back to the issue of war and its innate relationship to capitalism.

For as long as we allow our leaders to sell us the idea of war as a solution to the inherent contradictions of capitalism, no matter how the contradictions are masked ie, the 'war on terror' et al, we are doomed. And although I am by no means sold on the idea that a US invasion of Iran is a 'done deal', there is no doubt that the forces which impel capitalism to solve the problem of the over-accumulation of capital through war, will find an outlet at some time in the future unless we stop them.

At this point, I can already hear your cries of ridicule, 'The guy is mad! Stop them? How?'

I am confident that it can be done but it has to be achieved by focusing on the real causes of war, not by some vague appeal to justice or morality but by unpacking the way system actually works and this means first tackling those who sell us war, the media and the state's propaganda machinery.

Already the state's loss of legitimacy and credibility has opened the door to the realisation that our political leaders are 'false prophets' who have sold a lie to the public, the lie that when they cry peace they really mean war.

Furthermore, in order to wage war abroad it is first necessary to wage war at home, on us. Hence the struggle to defend our civil and political rights is also key as it goes to the very heart of the illusion of a democratic society.

The events of the past weeks reveal the process quite clearly; the more Bush and Blair's agenda unravelled, specifically on Iraq, the developing world and the environment, the more desperate they became to deflect a growing demand for a fundamental change in the direction of Western society. Hence a major diversion was necessary that would occupy the public's attention.

And this is not a new strategy as history quite clearly shows. Persuading us that waging war, whether on a foreign land or on our own populations is the 'last resort' requires extreme measures, namely the creation of a threat, real or invented, that is so great that it requires that we submit to the supreme authority of the State. This is Fascism no matter what name you give it.

But note that those who rule on behalf of those who own capital, the political class, are never the subject of that authority, they are instead, the ones who wield it.

And furthermore, those who own capital are also exempt from this control, it is after all administered on their behalf in order to preserve the rule of capital, hence you never see the ruling class complaining about a loss of liberty, for their liberty is preserved by sacrificing ours.

At the political level then, this is the reality of our times but underneath it is driven by an even more fundamental reality, that of economics. The contradictions that have plagued capitalism for several centuries are still with us and grow ever more extreme and unresolvable without recourse to war. This is the reality that is being masked by the euphemism called the 'war on terror'.

For the past forty or so years, the rule of capital has been maintained by instigating innumerable 'brush wars' in order to preserve access to resources and the control of markets, as the threat of mutual nuclear annihilation has held capital in check from starting a larger conflagration with its major rival, the Soviet Union. And although the Soviet Union is no more, it, along with China and possibly even India, still act as a block to a larger conflict as they still possess their own nuclear arsenals.

Hence the focus still remains on 'brush wars' but of a new kind that have come about firstly because the domestic populations of the imperium can no longer be persuaded to lay down their lives in their millions (surely a step forward of a kind). Secondly, because military technology enables the US and its one major ally, the UK, to conduct wars as destructive as

that of WWII but without the need of large armies.

So unlike the propaganda that preceded WWI or II, the most important objective is to persuade the domestic populations to accept the horrifying destruction of civilian populations as the 'price' that has to be paid to preserve civilisation. This can only be done by creating an enemy so 'evil', so 'alien' that it can justify the use of such horrifying weapons as cluster bombs, depleted uranium and the deliberate destruction of life support systems, water, sewage disposal, hospitals, communications and so forth.

And it is only by dehumanising the 'enemy' to such a degree that it is possible to sell war as peace and to use such overwhelming destructive power on defenceless civilian populations.

It is within this context that the 'war on terror' takes on its terrible logic, for it enables the imperium to justify the use of the far greater and all-consuming terror of totally mechanised destruction.

It's why when covering the genocidal policies of Israel, it is necessary for the media's propaganda blitz to first remove the humanity from the Palestinian people before it can destroy them. And can there be a greater demonstration of the power of the media to do just this than shameful coverage of the events in Gaza over the past week? Do I really need to contrast the coverage of those racist land thieves with the inhuman destruction of Palestinian lives and communities that has gone on, non-stop for decades without so much as a murmur from the corporate and state media.

These are the awful echoes of the 1930s that shaped the lives of my parents' generation. Do we really want to live through such a time again?

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